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SUBJECT: HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES WATCH SECURITY SITUATION

¶1. (SBU) On September 20, a convoy of two humanitarian vehicles were ambushed by unknown assailants in South Darfur on the main road between Nyala and Kass. Eight members of the NGO World Vision International (WVI), a USAID funded NGO, were in the convoy. The vehicles, clearly marked as humanitarian, were fired upon by two armed men who attacked the vehicles with automatic weapons, World Vision International Operations Director Mario Rodrigues told poloff. Three WVI staffers were wounded.

¶2. (SBU) On September 24, Rodrigues said that there were no fatalities but one of the three wounded remained in critical condition. He added that the attackers proceeded to rob the wounded and other passengers, but when a third unknown vehicle approached the ambush site, the attackers fled leaving the WVI vehicles. This attempted hijacking comes within a week after a hijacking at gunpoint of a WVI vehicle. There were no injuries during this hijacking.

¶3. (SBU) Separately, on September 25, local media claimed that the OXFAM Country Program Manager Caroline Nursey "threatened" to pull out of Darfur over deteriorating security conditions. Nursey told poloff that the local press reports are simply "not true" and misquoted her recent BBC interview. She told the BBC interviewer that several months ago, when security problems were at a peak, OXFAM prepared contingency plans to reduce operations and assessed its then current operational profile, concluding that while at the level of "extreme risk," OXFAM would remain because of the high level of need. Nursey added that in the past two to three weeks, the situation has again deteriorated. "We are keeping watch on this."

¶4. (SBU) Comment: In the past two weeks, coinciding with the ending of the rainy season, observers believe there is a discernible up-tick in armed attacks on civilians, particularly in Darfur. UN reports state that attacks against relief workers nationwide have increased by 150 percent over last year. Observers believe that armed bandits, with the ending of the rainy season and before the deployment of the UN hybrid military force, might continue their raids on civilians and humanitarian workers alike. On September 24, the High Level Committee on Humanitarian Aid, as part of their regular meeting, noted among other issues the recent rise in security related incidents. Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) leader Dr. Khalil Ibrahim said on September 26 that his group plans to continue fighting up to, and through the upcoming Darfur peace talks. End Comment.

FERNANDEZ